

“THE VANITY OF WEALTH.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Text for the Sermon: Ecclesiastes 5:8-20

Introduction.

Last week we were in the house of God, in worship, listening to God, growing in our fear of the Lord. It was a refuge from this life under the sun. And then we walked out the doors back into the world, and here we are back in the world under the sun, a world of oppression, injustice, materialism, and our souls are assaulted by reality.

That taste of sweet heaven is turning sour, that glimpse of glory is growing dim. Reality is sucking the life out of our souls. We leave the mountain top with God and find ourselves once again in the valley of death's shadow.

It raises a question. Why go to church if you only have to go back out into the world and all the problems are still there? Going to church doesn't make you immune to life under the sun.

Yet the Preacher holds out some hope, some joy in the midst of it all. Wait for it, watch for it. God isn't just in the church house, He also meets us in the world, in the midst of all our stuff and striving and doing.

First, he shows us the grievous evil under the sun, and then he shows us how God gives us the power and ability to experience joy. First, he will take us down, then he will lift us up.

It is a well-worn cliché, “You can't take it with you.” Yet as well-known as it is, so is it ignored as often as it is spoken. You have heard it a hundred times, but what effect has it had on your life?

When I was in seminary they told us no church search committee has ever once asked to see a pastor's grades. So don't kill yourself and rob yourself of your joy by pursuing grades.

I didn't listen. I was type A, competitive, driven, or probably more accurately, proud. I had graduated HS and college with honors and I was determined to do the same in graduate school. And guess what? No one asked to see them.

And what did it cost me? Long nights, less sleep, stress, missed social opportunities, less time with my wife, fewer date nights, less joy, less enjoyment, less smelling the roses, less time taking in the beauty of New England. Knowing what I know now, if I had it to do over again, I would take their advice and kill the pride/arrogance and have more joy.

“You can’t take it with you.” There are no U-Haul trailers behind funeral hearses. The vast amount of wealth buried with Egypt’s kings in the pyramids for their use in the afterlife was still there when unearth thousands of years later. *But nevertheless*, that hasn’t slowed us down or stopped us from accumulating more stuff and more money to buy stuff with.

Instead we live and die by the saying, “Some is good, more is better and too much is just right.”

Under the sun we live with the vanity of increase, the futility of more money, the wind chasing of wealth.

What do you and your spouse fight about the most? What did your parents fight about the most? Most couples when they argue, it is over money. It seems like in every marriage one is a spender and the other is a saver.

And it isn’t just marriages. It is business deals, city council meetings, budget hearings, lawsuits, inheritances, even wars over that insatiable drive to get more.

James 4:1-2 What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? 2 You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.

What are you most afraid of when it comes to your finances?
What are you in bondage to? What are you ruled by?

It is not a sin to be rich. But it is a sin to make wealth your priority or primary goal in life. Solomon is as wise as anyone to speak on this topic. He was the richest man to ever live, and he was miserable.

The love of money/stuff and the desire for it and more of it brings several serious problems, problems that are often ignored or dismissed. Solomon sets out in our text to give us *eight* proofs of what our Lord and Savior said:

Luke 12:15 Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.

Eight problems with the desire/lust for more stuff.

First, there will always be someone with more money/stuff than you, vss. 8-9.

There will always be someone with more stuff than you, and they will always be looking for a way to take advantage of someone else. Those with money oppress those without.

For an ancient guy, King Solomon sure has a realistic view of human nature, of the human heart. He has a very Calvinistic understanding of total depravity.

Under the sun there is corruption, dishonesty, injustice, people taking advantage of people. Don't be shocked, get used to it. There is always someone who thinks they can get what they want at someone else's expense. There is always someone above us we are trying to climb over on the way to the top.

Second, if you love money/stuff you will never have enough, vss. 10-11.

God created us to hunger and thirst and He provided the earth to provide what we need to satisfy that hunger and thirst. Hunger is satisfied by food, thirst is satisfied with drink, but hunger and thirst after wealth is not satisfied with wealth. It is insatiable, it is never satisfied.

When we start to accumulate, to gain, to amass, to need bigger barns, that creates a hunger and thirst that cannot be satisfied. He who loves money will not be satisfied with more money.

Money/stuff is like seawater, the more you drink the thirstier you get.

People who love stuff live and die by the motto, "Just a little more." If you ask them how much would be enough, the answer is, "Just a little more."

This is a chief characteristic of life under the sun, life in this fallen world.

It started with Eve. Adam and Eve had everything they needed and were cast out of the garden because they wanted that one thing they didn't have. From that point on the desire for more has haunted every human heart.

Third, one reason your will never be satisfied is because when your wealth increases your responsibilities, expenses, costs, increase, vs. 13.

He can see his wealth, he can see the account balances, but he can't enjoy it. With much wealth comes bigger houses that cost more to buy, to insure, to maintain, to heat and cool. More expensive cars that cost more to buy, to insure, to repair.

With much comes the need for accountants, lawyers, financial managers, consultants. With much comes the need to hire help, the more he has, the more he spends for what he has.

They strive to own more and before long what they own, owns them. Instead of receiving more benefit from your wealth, you receive less benefit from it.

We are aware of the lives of the rich and the famous, and we find ourselves glad we are not as encumbered as they are, surrounded by people, paparazzi, etc.

The person with little has little to worry about. The person with much has much to worry about, both to keep it safe and hang on to it and to get more of it.

How many people are stressing and losing sleep over the stock market and the prospect of a recession? Those with little aren't.

Notice Solomon's words are not words of advice, he isn't telling us what to do, he is simply observing and warning how life plays out in this fallen world.

Fourth, when your money/stuff increases you experience a corresponding increase in anxiety about the future of that wealth. You lose sleep, vs. 12.

The increase increases our worries and cares. Money/stuff fail us and don't provide us what they promise. It has ruined many both in body and soul with distress, increased cares; lose of sleep.

Fifth, God has an uncanny way to undermining the security of our money/stuff, vss. 13-14.

Proverbs 23:5 When your eyes light on it, it is gone, for suddenly it sprouts wings, flying like an eagle toward heaven.

Riches belong to the category of things that can perish, that will perish. The more you have the more ways there are for losing it. It can happen in countless ways.

Fire, flood, earthquake, market crash, recession, theft, bad investment, high risk, gambling.

It can be here today and gone tomorrow. What did Jesus say about moths, rust and thieves?

Sixth, no matter how much money/stuff we accumulate, we leave with as much as we arrived, vss. 15-16.

We go out just as we came in. What have we gained? So Solomon again asks the question, what is the advantage, where is the advantage of profit under the sun? We work, labor, and then it is all gone.

Solomon is trying to get through to us, all this striving after the wind. They that labor for the wind, will find their labor gone like the wind. Everything is going to burn up one day.

If we labor only for the things of this world, then we labor in vain, for nothing. Labor for what is eternal, for what is spiritual, what is lasting. Invest in eternity.

The desire for money/stuff is going to fail us in this life, but worse than that it will fail us in the life to come. Greed, covetousness, discontent are the choker of the Word of God, the choker of souls.

Matthew 13:22 As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.

Seventh, despite everything Solomon has said, there will still be those who spend all their days working to get more money/stuff, vs. 17.

They will eat of sleeplessness, vexation, frustration, affliction, anger, toiling for the wind. His vexation and sickness will hinder his pursuit of wealth, and reminds him of his approaching death which fills him with anxiety and apprehension, which reminds him he will leave everything behind and go to a world he has made no preparation for.

Even if such a person has none of the things Solomon has mentioned happen to him, even if he makes it to the top and has the world by the tail and none of the troubles wealth brings, his soul will still be required of him, he still must die and leave it all behind.

All gone, nothing. Vanity under the sun, chasing the wind.

Verses 18-20

So what are we to do? What hope or help is there?

Solomon proposes a course of action, a way forward in this life under the sun.

What a dramatic change we encounter in from verse 17 to verse 18.

In 17 he eats in darkness in much vexation and sickness and anger.

In 18 he eats and drinks in enjoyment in all the toil.

Finally, be content. Work for enjoyment, not achievement, not possessions, vs. 18-20.

This is not just a wise saying about simplicity and moderation. It is much more. This is the conclusion to his argument. God. This is always the key, the secret of life.

Nothing can satisfy our souls, except the one who made it. All the world cannot fill our souls, except the one who made it. Why does stuff fail us and disappoint us? Because it is not God. It is not designed to satisfy the deepest needs of our souls, it is not meant to be trusted in or relied on. Only God can be trusted to ultimately satisfy us. Only God can be relied on to never fail or fall short or run out.

God gives us life, God gives us our lot, our place, God gives us our stuff. It is all the gift of God.

The person who is content, and doesn't stress or agonize or worry about it or having enough for the future has a gift from God. That is grace.

When we cheerfully, thankfully, joyfully use what God has given us, we honor the one who gave it to us, we use it as He intended. Receive the good from it God intends, and do good with it, as He also intends.

When we are able to receive what we have and receive it gladly, only then can we truly enjoy what we have.

Be satisfied with God and be grateful, blessed, thankful for each and every one of His small gifts given to us every day. Take joy and delight in the smallest of treasures and pleasures. Don't take anything for granted because that is taking the giver for granted.

God allots to us each of the gifts He gives, enjoy each one.

Psalm 16:5-6 The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot.
6 The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance.

Being able to rejoice in your labor is the gift of God.

Conclusion and application.

- A. Accept Your Lot. Accept your station. The grass is not always greener on the other side.
- B. Fulfill Your Labor – Work! Be steady.
- C. Enjoy Your Life – Don't get caught in the greed trap. Laugh more. Lighten up. Relax.
- D. Serve Your Lord – Invest in his kingdom's work. Be content with Jesus. He's enough.

Live by faith. Live by looking upward, not around. Let nothing temporal become your treasure. Let your deepest joy be in nothing that you can lose or have taken.

Learn the joy of much or little, no matter what. Delight in what you have. Whether you live in a small rented apartment or a huge house, let your hearts true home be the Father's house.

Be content, do good, give generously, share what God has given you, hold all your stuff loosely, be content. It's just money, which is to say, it is not much compared to the riches of our inheritance in glory.

Pray for the ability to rightly enjoy what God has given us to enjoy. God loves to be enjoyed, He gives us countless reasons to enjoy Him.

When we experience joy, in that moment we come in touch with what God experience all the time.

The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.
Or as some like to say it to glorify God by enjoying Him forever.